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ORIGINAL PAPERS.

LECTURES ON POETRY, THE SUBSTANCE OF WHICH WAS
DELIVERED AT THE ROYAL INSTITUTION,
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LECTURE I.

I PROPOSE, in the greater portion of the following Lectures, to treat of poetry rather abstractedly than historically. But as on entering on every subject there is an obvious advantage in taking a preliminary view of its nature at large, I shall devote this first lecture to some general remarks on poetical composition. I shall first of all endeavour to discriminate it from some other pursuits of the human mind, in which the intellect and the imagination are both concerned, and shall then subjoin some thoughts on the reciprocal influence with which it affects and is affected by the moral culture of society. If I should be far from giving my observations that comprehensiveness and method which ought to belong to a full and regular treatise on poetry, I must beg allowance to be made for my object being much more limited than to compose such a work. The philosophy of the poet's art is a vast field of enquiry, over the entire extent of which I make no pretensions to expatiate. My attempt shall only be to investigate some of its prominent and most interesting points.

Few sayings respecting poetry have been more frequently felt or repeated than the words of Lord Bacon—"that it accommodates the shews of things to the desires of the mind." It has not been always observed that the noble author uses this expression when considering poetry only as "*imaginary history*."* From his

* "Poetry," says Lord Bacon, "is a kind of learning generally confined to the measure of words, but otherwise extremely licentious, and truly belonging to the imagination, which, being unrestrained by laws, may make what unnatural mixtures and separations it pleases. It is taken in two senses, or with respect to words and matter. The first is but a character of style, and a certain form of speech not relating to the subject; for a true narration may be delivered in verse, and a feigned one in prose;—but the second is a capital part of learning, and no other than feigned History. And here, as in our decisions we endeavour to find and trace the true sources of learning, and this

having previously said that "he should take no particular notice of Satire, Elegy, Epigram, Ode, &c. but should hand them over to philosophy and the arts of speech," I suspect that his Lordship applied his memorable words to feigned history alone—but, to my humble apprehension, they will bear an universal application to poetry. For I can suppose no instance in which an affecting poem, taken as a whole, does not accommodate the appearances of nature to our wishes. The accommodation indeed is most palpably made in fiction; it is nevertheless also effected, although more subtly, in the poetical representation of truth. Delightful as nature is to us, yet a literal and facsimile transcript of her accidental appearances will not constitute poetry. Those circumstances, even of true objects, must alone be chosen and combined, which excite the warmth and light of agreeable passions and associations. When the poet, therefore, exhibits the credibilities of existence without the aid of invented characters or of fable, he still selects and concentrates only those traits of truth which attach our sensibility, and he re-

frequently without giving way to custom, or the established order, we shall take no particular notice of *satire, elegy, ode, &c.* but turn them over to philosophy and the arts of speech, and, under the name of Poetry, treat nothing more than Imaginary History."

I beg pardon if I mistake the meaning of so great an authority; but it would seem to me to be a natural inference from the proposed turning over of certain classes of composition to philosophy, that the poet in those classes is to be judged of by the same canons of criticism with the philosopher. If the transference be not for this purpose, I am at a loss to see what other end it can answer; and, to my humble apprehension, there is not in this distinction, at least thus briefly as it is worded, that irresistible clearness which so usually attends Lord Bacon's decisions. Supposing the poet and the philosopher both to endite truth, will they not treat it in a different manner, and ought they not therefore to be judged of by different laws? The philosopher exhibits all the circumstances of truth so investigated and analysed as to calm and counteract our passions: The poet selects and combines only those circumstances which excite them, and which connect emotion with intellectual perception. Poetry accommodates the shews of things to the mind's desires: Philosophy has in view to make the mind accommodate its desires to the realities of things.

The classes of poetry, thus discriminated from imaginary history, and left to be turned over to philosophy and the arts of speech, are satire, elegy, epigram, ode, &c. The arts of speech is a vague expression; I shall therefore only speak of the consignment as it regards philosophy. The light host of epigrams may take their place where they please; and so may satires, though they are at best but a one-sided sort of philosophy—But the lyrical ode may be highly fanciful, and it is difficult to see any thing in its transports peculiarly fit to be tried by a jury of philosophers. Didactic poetry has the most *apparent* connexion with philosophy; but the connexion is always forced, and generally unfavourable. It is the most unteaching of all things, and, in reality, is not judged of by its power of instruction: otherwise, the *Georgics* of Virgil might be submitted to the Board of Agriculture. There is unquestionably philosophy in poetry—in spirit, not in demonstrative form; but that spirit, I apprehend, is not locked up in any distinct compartment of the art, and least of all in those where the poet affects to be most philosophical. Nor can I see why classes of poetry different from imaginary history, are more to be referred to philosophy than imaginary history itself. There is surely more knowledge of man diffused over the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, not to speak of dramatic poetry, than over all the soberest didactic verses, and shrewdest satires, and most contemplative elegies, that were ever written.

jects others that would disturb the harmony of his picture, or repel our sympathy. This makes Truth herself appear more beautiful in the Muses' mirror than in her casual reality. I am far from saying, that fiction is of slight utility to poetry: I only mean, that the true circumstances of nature, when exquisitely chosen and combined, will constitute that high beauty of art which we call the ideal, without the necessary intervention of fiction. Nor do I mean that language can produce this effect, unless it also possess the power of exciting fanciful associations. The passions that give life to poetry are indissolubly connected with the liveliness of the associating faculty. No doubt, the language of real passion is not, in general, prone to remote and surprising combinations of thought. The wit of the fancy is a doubtful indication of passion. Nevertheless, when we read a strain of deep feeling, we naturally imagine it to come from a mind of rich associations, and it excites a reverie of luxuriant images in our own. But remote fancies, whether they are congenial or not with the language of passion, may have their place in the poet's survey of existence, and yet may be far from amounting to fiction, in the fair and general sense of the word. It is only in that acceptation, namely, the feigning of events and characters, that I deny fiction to be perpetually and essentially necessary to the poet. If all the imagery of language is to be so called, prose itself will be found to teem with fiction. But, however necessary fanciful associations may be to Poetry, she may pourtray the realities of Nature without absolute fiction, so as to touch the inmost recesses of our sympathy. The famous Love Ode of Sappho, for instance, affects us by the simple vehemence of its passion—and yet it is not fiction. If it were asked, how such a poem can be said “to accommodate the shews of things to the desires of the mind,” I should answer, that it conveys the conception of amatory transport as completely by selecting and concentrating the traits of truth, as if the finest artist had embodied it to the eye with ideal beauty. It is all nature, but it is perfect nature—there is no part of the outline weak, though it seems as if every one could trace it. And yet, though every one feels the passion, it has been seldom so well described in the course of two thousand years.

The spirited selection and concentration of truth is one means, and fiction is another, by which the poet maintains his empire. The one founds it, and the other extends it. If truth can thus be found, of itself, to constitute the soul of entire and inspired poetical effusions, fiction cannot well be denominated the soul of poetry; and I should rather be inclined to call it her highest prerogative. It is a privilege, too, of which the poet can avail himself more than any other imitative artist. For though painting and sculpture may surpass the power of verse in im-

mediate impression, yet from being mute and chained to the moment, they are sensibly limited in the means of explaining more of their subjects than meets the eye, and they can with difficulty embody any fiction which tradition or poetry has not in some degree prepared, and placed in their hands; whereas poetry, by her "winged words," to use the noble Homeric phrase, can widen the circuit of human thoughts undefinedly into the past and the future, and may feign what has not even been surmised by tradition. To return to the words of Lord Bacon, they apply, though I conceive not more truly, yet with easier and more extensive illustration, to imaginary history than to any other class of poetry. And his observation, that the art shews itself to be something divine, as it raises the mind by accommodating "the shews of things to its desires," bespeaks a sensibility in the sage as deep as his intellect. For poetry, in its highest sense, is scarcely any thing else than a synonyme for the religion of nature. It is true that we have a pleasure in the poet's representations of life, from our attachment to life itself. All imitations of objects have a certain value to the mind, as the resemblances and records of a perishable existence. They surprise us with traits of nature that have escaped our observation or faded from our memories, and affect us as if they restored to us a lost or absent friend, with all the tender illusion, though without the indistinctness, of a dream. But the poet does not establish his influence always merely on graphic fidelity to nature; he knows that there is a disposition within us to go beyond hope itself, and to shape reveries of things, not as they are, but as we would wish them to be. There is no imagination which has not, at some time or other, dreamt in a paradise of its own creation. It is true that this optimism of the fancy, when it vents itself in the castle-buildings of a weak mind, or is masked under the gravity of a false and Utopian philosophy, becomes pernicious and ridiculous. The love of ideal happiness, when thus drivelling and disfigured, appears a bastard species of the fancy, to which poetical feeling disdains acknowledging its resemblance or affinity. But when we look to the day-dreams of inspired fiction, and when we feel the superhuman force and excellence of its characters, it is then that we acknowledge the beatific idealism of our nature to be a feature of divine expression in the moral aspect of man. To compare the conceptions of so frail a being with his actual attainments of happiness, would be sufficient to persuade us, without a hint from revelation, that our natures are either the wreck of some superior past intelligence, or the germ and promise of a new one.

The object of poetry being to delight the imagination, divides it from every other pursuit of language. But it is neces-

sary to recollect that this is its primary and distinguishing object ; because the fancy and passions are often addressed in other provinces of animated composition, and though the poet may have more imaginative powers than other men, he is not the only composer in language who employs them. In prose itself, zeal will warm the associations, and mould them into imagery ; and metaphors, similes, and comparisons, will be found more or less scattered over every style that is not devoted to pure science and abstraction. Hence, while poetry claims her rank among intellectual studies, those other pursuits, which have truth more severely and immediately for their object, also make their occasional excursions into the field of fancy. So that, distinct as the ends of the poet and the moral reasoner may be, the one being pleasure and the other instruction, we shall find Shakspeare furnishing texts for philosophy, and the apothegms of Bacon adorned with figurative illustrations*. In pure metaphysics it is, no doubt, agreed, that fanciful analogies between mind and matter are apt to be dangerous and delusive lights to the enquirer, and that the language of philosophy should be shaded as much as possible by abstraction, like the glass that is darkened in order to enable us to look at the sun. Yet, in spite of this acknowledgment, we shall often find logicians amusing themselves very contentedly with ingenious images. Locke has given a description of the process of memory that is absolutely poetical. And if the flowers of Parnassus may thus be found starting up so far from their native soil as among the dust and thorns of metaphysics, how much more naturally may we expect to meet with them in the more genial regions of moral sentiment. In fact, there is a poetry in the human mind which partially diffuses itself over all its moral pursuits ; and few men who have ever strongly influenced society, have been possessed of cold or weak imaginations. The orator must, on many occasions, appeal to the passions as well as the understanding ; and the historian, even whilst adhering to facts, gives a natural prominence to spirit-stirring events and heroic characters, which lays a frequent and just hold on our enthusiasm.

But still there are plain limits which divide poetry from history, philosophy, and oratory, although the poet may often

* I allude to the felicity of Lord Bacon's figurative expressions, and not to their frequent occurrence ; for as a writer he is (as we might naturally expect) no pursuer of such ornaments. But when he does indulge in them, there is a charm indescribably striking in the contrast,—I should say in the harmony between his deep thought and elastic fancy. And his beauties of this description may be treasured in the memory with as much safety as admiration. For though he may be said to blend figures with his philosophy, he mixes them not with abstract metaphysics, but with maxims that come home to our bosoms and business. And, unlike many philosophers, he uses them as mere illustrations of argument, and not as their subject.

impart philosophical truths, though the orator may move our affections, and the historian spread agreeable pictures before the fancy. We may again consider the poet as either exhibiting a true representation of Nature, or "*Truth severe in fairy fiction dressed.*" Viewed in the former light, he may seem to approach more nearly to the character of the historian than when he deals in fable; but he is still as essentially distinct from him in his main scope. For we must interpret the character of history by a collective view of its intended effect, not by appealing to the impression of insulated chapters and sentences, which, though they may rise to poetical eloquence, give the pursuit no generic identity with an art devoted to the imagination. Poetry affects us by views of the good and evil of existence thrown into large masses of light and shade. But History cannot give the chequered aspect of human affairs this supported contrast and strength of colouring without betraying anxiety for effect, and diminishing our confidence in her value as a science. The poet feels and inspires unbroken and determinate tones of emotion, whether they be gay, plaintive, or impetuous. They may change and succeed in rapid vicissitude, but they swell and fall in harmony, and even their fluctuation, with skilful management, need not make them check and neutralize each other. But the records of life, like life itself, teem with the elements not only of mutable, but of abrupt and jarring sensations. The historian may often excite our enthusiasm in this discordant spectacle, but he cannot prevent it from being often mortified. His great end is to make us impartial judges of events, and he must withhold no consequential fact, be it ever so unromantic, from the balance of impartiality. Into that balance he must throw all prosaic considerations and proofs of truth, that enable us to weigh it dispassionately. If he does this, he must necessarily make our zeal circumspect and patient of drawbacks. But the moment that our sensibilities are thus modified by special exceptions and abatements, they cease to be the living fountains of poetry. Argumentative scruples and caution have no place there: for the very error of feeling is more poetical than its equilibrium. Hence we never smile so much even at an outrageous hyperbole, as when a dull good man betrays the lack of his would-be enthusiasm by some candid and qualifying expression in verse that escapes from the prose of his conscience.

We bring to history a philosophical interest, a curiosity to trace the chain of human events as causes and consequences of each other. Not that history is destitute of a harmony peculiar to herself. She proportions the space which facts occupy in narration to their magnitude, and gives them an agreeable order by tracing their springs and results. But that is far

from a poetical harmony, even in the picture of truth; and in the interval between her most interesting scenes, she must follow the links of their connexion over grounds of detail which no good taste would attempt to make picturesque to the fancy.

As to fiction, it may seem superfluous to say that it belongs to poetry and to no other province of composition. It must be recollected at the same time, that the poet's fiction would not be a discriminating feature of his art unless it were open and avowed. Falsehoods in ethics and rhetoric often please us, but we are not conscious of their deception, and the moment the spell is broken we are displeased that it has been thrown over us. Imaginary systems of philosophy may last for ages after their founders are dead, but not a day after their foundation is detected. The orator has certainly to deal with our passions and imagination, but his object is through these to effect persuasion; and when he attains his end, of what do we imagine that he persuades us? Unquestionably, of the literal truth, whether it regards our own selfish interests, or abstract justice with regard to others. There is no doubt that the orator may often covenant with himself to gain us over by arguments, whether true or false; but he makes no such bargain with any intelligent part of his hearers; and if he succeeds in the latter way, it is only by fraud. In poetry, and there alone, the illusion of language is not deception. When either the pleader misleads us into false sympathies, or the sophist into fanciful theories, there is no convention of the mind with their falsifications; nor would the wildest zealot of the most Utopian school of philosophy so far compromise the dignity of his own understanding, as to acknowledge to himself that, for the sake of pleasure, he was voluntarily embracing an error. But in poetry, we are transported to enthusiasm with what, as to literal occurrence, we know on the slightest reflection to be a dream. Nor does the retrospect of the judgment at all prevent us from rebuilding, with fresh delight, the airy edifice which has been thus disenchanted.

At the same time that we discriminate the end of severer pursuits from that of poetry, we must not lose sight of the intellectual character of the art. All harmony of effect must proceed from principles observed by intelligence; and although those truths which the poet selects and concentrates for the purpose of delighting us, are grouped together on principles very different from those of demonstration or historical transcript—although he blends them with illusion, and addresses them to the imagination—it does not follow that the understanding is unconcerned with his works. The very illusion of the mind, unaccompanied with deception, of itself bespeaks that something is done to obtain the acquiescence of the judgment; nor could

a rational being like man cast a complacent retrospect even over the visions of his fancy, if these, in departing from the literal form, retained no affinity to the spirit of truth. The term imagination, therefore, when spoken of as the organ of poetry, ought not to be taken in the narrow meaning of mere fanciful association, to which it is sometimes limited, from the unsettled usage of language; but should be understood as a complex power of the mind—including fancy to associate ideas, and taste and judgment to combine them.* Admitting that, among the powers of the imagination, fancy is that which most strikingly distinguishes the man of genius from other men, let us glance at a few of the circumstances which betoken the connexion of intellect both with the enjoyment and the production of poetry. As to the understanding of the reader, it must be confessed, indeed, that it is submitted to the poet with no very striking symptoms of being likely to be treated with severity; for he addresses himself mainly to our sympathies and affections, and he professes to tell us no more of the truth than he can instantly render intelligible and agreeable. Moreover, he leads us into an ideal world, where the empire of literal truth is at an end, and where the laws of congruity that are to bind the new objects which he describes, appear to us to be, more than they really are, at the poet's own disposal. But though the needle varies in the compass when we are at first launched upon the ocean of fiction, we soon find that there are limits to its variation. In other words, the liberties which he takes with our belief, cannot please us without a general deference to our moral judgments. And if the poet neither tasks nor fatigues our understandings, it is not because he has unimportant truths to communicate, but because he is bound to reveal them with an easy and beguiling perspicuity. It is true that he conducts no abstracted chain of reasoning on the connexion of men's actions and passions, nor on their social interests, nor on their manners, religion, nor morals. Yet he throws light upon them all. He shews the landscape of life, the customs of ages, and the contrasts of individual character, with a power so full and illustrative, as sometimes to invite the historian and the philosopher themselves to consult him. It need not be denied, that the romance of poetry, if improperly studied, and imitated as a principle of con-

* Dugald Stewart calls the imagination "a complex power. It includes, conception or simple apprehension, which enables us to form a notion of those former objects of perception or of knowledge, out of which we are to make a selection (in the fine arts); abstraction, which separates the selected materials from the qualities and circumstances which are connected with them in nature; and judgment, or taste, which selects the materials, and directs their combination. To these powers we may add, that particular habit of association to which I formerly gave the name of fancy."—*Elements of the Philosophy of the Mind*, p. 477.

duct in real life, would produce absurd and fantastic actions ; but so would the abstract truths of philosophy, if applied as rules of practice without accommodation to circumstances. It is enough to say of poetry, that a recognizance of general truth is indispensable to our enjoyment of it. For the wildest fiction is bound to be consistent with itself; and its shapes, which are but magnified types of the natural world, must still exhibit, amidst their marvellous attributes, a harmony of parts that shall remind us of Nature. But the main business of the poet lies in the sphere of humanity ; and there, though he may feign events and characters out of nothing, yet he can no more misrepresent the passions of our moral fabric with impunity, than the artist in visible forms can trespass against the laws of anatomy or perspective. Even in forsaking *minute* probabilities, fiction has in view to make us acquainted with those which more importantly interest us ; and she rises above the literal ground of truth only to take a wider and more commanding prospect of its horizon. Thus when the dramatist brings together events and characters with a happiness and swiftness of succession that could hardly, if ever, exist in reality, his representation, though containing improbabilities, may, nevertheless, be more instructive, and put us in possession of more truth in the aggregate, than if he had gauged the likelihood of all his events by the doctrine of chances, or chained their time to the hour and moment of chronology. For he can thus illustrate human nature in situations which he could not otherwise conceive, or which he could not, at least, pourtray with spirit and passion. And it is only in impassioned situations that the inmost traits of human character can be consistently described as disclosing themselves : for

“As perilous rocks lie in the sleeping seas
Unknown, and make no discord with the waves
Till these are blown against them with vexation ;
So there are secrets in men’s hearts as hid
In the hour of peace, as if they had no being,
And but speak out when passions rise in tempests.”

The importance of the intellectual faculty to the poet himself can be hid from us only by deceptive appearances. He may often seem to be happiest in composition when he abandons himself most carelessly to the accidental impulses of his fancy ; but his acquaintance with truth must have come to him through much observation and reflection, though it seems to be intuitive amidst the burst of his inspiration. Indeed, when a writer conducts a great design of imaginary story ; when he makes its characters congenial with the moral experience of mankind ; and when he gives their complicated situations a perspicuity that supports our attention unfatigued—can we doubt that such a writer

has exerted his own judgment in proportion to the trouble which he saves to our own? He must understand the human heart who describes it well; and his knowledge is not the less intellectual that it shews itself in no formal process of reasoning, but operates like a spirit rather felt than seen, in giving congruity to the shapes of his fancy.

Owing to the subtle manner in which Poetry teaches us truth through our sympathies, while she abandons literal veracity, her art, though it appeals to the very simplicity of the heart, always yields a heightened enjoyment to the retrospect of judicious Taste. That power at least increases "our sober certainty of waking bliss." It may not be compared to the mine that yields us treasure, but it supplies a touchstone for appreciating its purity. The beauties of poetry shine on inconsiderate judgments, like the sun on objects fortuitously placed, the shadows of which but imperfectly enable us to guess at the hour of the day. Experienced sensibility is like the gnomon. It measures the altitude and dials the light of inspiration.

I have repeated the words by which Lord Bacon so well characterizes poetry, namely, that "it accommodates the shews of things to the desires of the mind," oftener than I should have quoted any expression of less weight and authority. When the truth of the expression is admitted however, it still leaves room for speculation on the fact of things painful in themselves being made subservient by the poet's art to the enjoyment of the imagination. This apparent paradox has been explained by some writers in a way that would make it still more paradoxical, namely, that painful emotions possess inherent sublimity. Human experience certainly contradicts this supposition. Pain and fear are, in themselves, humiliating sensations; and when a poet fills our imaginations with the conception of a battle or a storm, it is not the sufferings of humanity that constitute the sublime, but our associated ideas of the human energy and intrepidity which we suppose to encounter them. In like manner, when we are touched in fiction by the distress of venerable age or innocent sensibility, our reverence, enthusiasm, and love of beauty, not the thoughts of distress, occasion our enjoyment. Our predominant emotions in sublimity and pathos are the very antidotes to pain and danger, namely, glorying zeal and tender affection; and it is because they are antidotes that the poet employs them. The idea of happiness is, therefore, still the sovereign feeling of poetry. It lurks even in poetic misanthropy, when she tries to shape an infernal paradise out of her own pride and independence.*

* This subject has been ably treated by Mr. Knight in his *Work on Taste*. His illustrations, which refute Burke's theory of the Sublime and Beautiful, are too extensive

As language, the medium of the poet's communication, is judged of by the ear, or at all events by the memory of the ear, even in tacit perusal, the poet studies to make it agreeable to us by harmony. In prose itself we are not denied some degree of the same gratification; nor is it always an arbitrary association which we form between a writer's mind and the modulation of his style, when we infer slovenly habits of thought from his uncouth periods, and a graceful spirit from his power of making expression attractive even in its outward form.

But the utmost harmony which we can enjoy in prose is loose and desultory, and the grace of a prose style is not improved, but deteriorated, by any doubtful approximation to the harmony of numbers. In verse we not only enjoy the recollection of cadences that are past, but agreeably anticipate those which are coming. In prose we enjoy the harmony of periods only as they pass; and we should not be able to make any calculation by the ear of the pauses or flow of clauses that are to follow. No doubt, we experience in a prose sentence that the use of a spondee or an anapaest may have made a particular clause more graceful; but the moment we detect the writer's assignation for the use of any particular foot or rhythm, we are displeased. A sentence may be appropriately long or short, but we must have no precognition of its length or brevity. Alternations of common and triple time, which displease us in verse, are agreeable in prose. The harmony of a prose style, if it should not be, ought at least to appear, unpremeditated; and the best improvement which a writer can give to it by revision is, not to smooth or balance his periods, but to break up and vary their cadence from the monotony which carelessness is apt to produce. In prose, the ear follows the writer; in verse, it goes before him: a compromise between the variety of the one and the regularity of the other gives us the grace of neither. It is true, that in our translation of the Bible, measured prose is not without solemnity to our peculiar associations; but this dead march of language has never been permanently admired in any other than sacred compositions.*

for me to quote; and good illustrations are not safely abridged. But the book is almost in every one's hands. It confirmed me in several opinions which I endeavoured to convey in the first lecture I ever gave at the Royal Institution, at a time when I had not read Mr. Knight's Work, long celebrated as it had been, and was not aware that he not only anticipated, but explained those opinions in a clearer manner than that in which I had treated them, and with a minuteness into which my limits would not allow me to enter.

* The strictest anticipation of harmony which the ear can enjoy in verse, may be produced by two circumstances. The first is that of lines being equal in length from

It is true, that the fulfilment of what the ear anticipates in harmonious verse, though generally distinct, does not extend to the minutest inflections of harmony. These often give a grace to modulation from their very variety. But, upon the whole, the beauty of verse is supported by coinciding with our expectation, and there is much more chance of our being startled by strange turns of versification, than palled with those that are familiar. Hence nations have the highest relish for their own forms of metre, with the flow of which habit has made them best acquainted.

Though the delight which we experience in verse comes to us through organic impression, we must never lose sight of the intimate dependance of our pleasure on the associating faculty. It has been said, that harmonious words of unknown meaning would yield not the slightest pleasure to the ear.* I am not quite persuaded that this is the fact, for we are naturally fond of rhythm and time, both in articulate and inarticulate sounds. That pleasure, no one will doubt, is intrinsically feeble. But be it ever so slight, it may affect the association; for we must not judge mechanically of the influences that act on that subtle power. Slight impressions will often awaken all her activity; while strong luxuries of the sense absorb us in sensation. In reality, however, to abstract the consideration of harmony from its union with meaning, is to dismember the conception of our enjoyment

beginning to end, *i. e.* including the same number of syllables, or so proportioned that their inequalities and length have a regular return. The second is a similarity in the internal modulation of lines. There is, no doubt, agreeable variety in the harmony of verse without exactly fulfilling both of those circumstances; but they cannot be both absent from language at once, and leave it the character of verse. The length and shortness of lines may be varied, so as to present themselves fortuitously long or short. Much beautiful poetry has been written in this manner, and many persons enjoy its variety. Those who are lost to its magic irregularity may fairly allege that the four corner-pillars of Epic Poetry, the *Iliad*, the *Æneid*, *Jerusalem*, and *Paradise Lost*, have been constructed on a different principle; but still there is a charm in variety, and this is still versification. But if the writer, besides using long or short measure at will, in the same poem, were also to pass at random from common time in one line, to triple time in the next line, or *vice versa*, he would certainly cease to write verse altogether. Even with lines of equal length, this vicissitude of time would be discordant. If a strain, for instance, were to commence thus, in triple time—

At the close of the day, when the hamlet was still,
and to continue in the second line,

And save the torrent, nought was heard upon the hill:
the last twelve syllables, though as strictly rhythmical as the former, would disappoint us, by change of time, and we should much rather expect him to write

And nought but the torrent was heard from the hill.

The vicissitude of time within the same strain, is therefore an anomaly in verse; and if it can have a place, it can come only like a discord in music, the more rarely, I apprehend, the better.

* Mr. Knight on Taste.

under the pretence of analysing it ; for the thoughts and sound come to us simultaneously. There may be circumstances in the delight which verse yields us too impalpable to be discriminated. But we are sensible that it excites our perception of order, which is always pleasing. We feel also that harmonious language is consentaneous with the full and voluble sensations of poetry, which have nothing that falters with doubt or diffidence. At the same time, whilst we sympathize with the poet's torrent of feelings, we are sensible that our own powers of language could not throw them into the channel of musical expression, though it appears, when found, to be their natural bed. In addition to this sympathy with his triumph, his numbers assist our memory. Their utility to that effect is experienced in pages much less interesting than those of the Muse. And if verse can strengthen our retention of a dry and dreary muster-roll of words, how much more delightfully important must it be in fixing the fleetest and sweetest traits of imagination in the mind ! Verse materially promotes distinct conception, by pointing the antithesis of words, and by making their grammatical relations more distinct. — It must, therefore, help the understanding : an important circumstance in an art which is bound to inform that faculty with the slightest possible fatigue.

It has accordingly been resorted to in language ever since human beings, arising above the mere animal sense of existence, had bursts of tenderness to utter on the past, or of public zeal upon the present, or of religious anticipation on the future. It is older than prose as a studied form of composition. And poetry was the original record not only of human feelings, but of all belief, when history and religion were shrouded in fable. No doubt, it might tend to perpetuate superstition, but it preserved also feelings and thoughts that deserved not to perish, and indirectly prepared man for philosophical pursuits, whilst it sweetened and protracted the morning dreams of his intellectual day.

When the more diffuse use of writing led to the cultivation of prose, subjects of business and science were withdrawn from verse, and only those of imagination were left to it. But after men were either satiated with verse, or became too indolent to employ it, tales of fiction also were ended in prose. It need not be denied that fiction can thus come closer to life by the humility of speaking prose in the drama, and of imitating biography and history in her narrative style. But illusion itself is not an unconditional charm to the imagination ; and the possibility of language losing agreeable effect by the strict imitation of life, is certainly exemplified in one species of composition, namely, in the graver Drama. The effect of prose tragedies, I think, will

generally be confessed to bring the pathos and terror of life too familiarly near us, by withdrawing that medium of language which interposes romantic and softening associations. No doubt, the stage is the mode of exhibiting nature, which requires the most reconciling art to soften her painful aspect, and prose fiction may be found more engaging in narrative than in tragedy. It is accordingly there, namely, in narrative fiction, that we find the great works of imagination which compel us to extend our view of Poetry from its popular to its philosophical meaning. Under the latter acceptation we comprehend all works of original and delightful fancy; and under the former those which not only "*Fill the impassion'd heart, but win the harmonious ear.*" The comparative magic of ideal nature will, no doubt, be differently estimated by men's different sensibility to the power of numbers. But the common usage of language gives the title of poet only to him who gives his art its crowning ornament; and we think of Milton more emphatically as a poet than even Cervantes.

Language does not give us this associated idea of preference without some reason. The prose writer of fiction drops at his outset the form of language most congenial with determinate or poetical emotion. Exceptions may exist, but, generally speaking, even the great and high order of prose fiction fulfils this token. It gives consummate inventions of character to the imagination, and these are poetical and ideal whether they be grave or gay. But, on the one hand, when prose fiction is serious, it aims at a less sustained elevation of the fancy, and stoops designedly from pathos and sublimity to views of life, which may refresh and amuse us, but are not poetry. Again, if prose has ever rivalled verse in ideal fiction, it is in the comic; and our sense of the comic, though it comes strictly within the powers of the imagination, stands confessedly the lowest among them. The primary object of ridicule is incongruity; and the laughing writer must therefore seek his materials, not merely in the humble, for these are often the most poetical, but in the HUMILIATING circumstances of existence. It is therefore in comedy that verse and prose appear to present their claims of possession on the most debateable ground. Comedy indeed must, I think, on the whole, be called poetical in its nature; and, as verse always heightens the expressiveness of language, as it wings the shaft of wit, and gives elasticity to the figures of fancy, it surely were better retained by the Comic Muse. But still her gaiety may compensate for her dishabille, and she makes no important sacrifice of her dignity in descending to the dialect of ordinary life. It is with the tender luxury of the mind, or with its loftier enthusiasm, that harmonious numbers have their most congenial alliance. Those feelings have an abstracted and unwordly cha-

racter, which belongs not to the sense of ridicule. They are drawn from conceptions of nature undisturbed by the discord of contempt; and as their luxury to the mind is full and pure, they naturally claim to be expressed in the language of harmony. Verse assuredly is neither a certain token nor guarantee of inspiration; but it tends at least constantly to remind the true poet of his high calling, to make his thoughts music to the mind as well as the ear—whilst the use of a prose style insensibly leads to prosaic views and sensations of life. Accordingly, prose fiction, collectively speaking, adopts not only the matter of fact air, but the spirit also, of biography and history. It feigns events indeed, but makes them appear no more poetically ideal than the literal transcripts of reality. I allude not to the highest rank of novels, which exhibit a mighty idealism in the picture of nature, though it may be interspersed with shades of common-place. Nor do I intend expressing disrespect for a meritorious and useful, though secondary class of such writings, which gradually diverge from this character. I only mean that the great mass of prose fictions deserve not to be called works of imagination, though they relate feigned events. The bulk of its writers pursue, not a minor path of poetry, but a totally different track. Their intention, and the desire of their readers, is avowedly common-place. They have no purpose to give a heightened or select image of life, but its flat likens; and to ensure its resemblance, they sometimes conscientiously throw in all its *ennui* to the bargain. Even when common-place novel-writing leaves this safe insipidity, and tampers with the passions, it does not, on that account, approach nearer to the character of a poem. For the enjoyment of the imagination, in a poetical sense, is as little allied to sensuality as to dulness; and as productions of art, the immoral poisons of such fiction are as unsavoury as its moral drugs. It is true that the whole host of novels, to judge by their popularity, answer in one respect to Lord Bacon's definition of Poetry that "they accommodate the shews of things to the desires of the mind." But to what sort of desires? In how many instances to the love of scandal and personality! In how few, to more than a petty curiosity in the irritations and embarrassments of life! This dissipation of the fancy stands exactly in the same relation to poetry as to algebra.

ORIGINAL PAPERS.

LECTURES ON POETRY, BY T. CAMPBELL.

LECTURE III.

Greek Poetry.

IT is impossible to trace the majestic stream of Greek poetry to its earliest fountains. That Greece had strains anterior to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, is evident from the nature of poetical composition,* as well as from the works of Homer. Greek poetry could not have dispensed with the usual progressiveness of human art, or have sprung up at once to the full effulgence of epic excellence, like a tropical sunrise unpreceded by a dawn. Accordingly we find Homer, as we might expect, alluding to the heroic songsters of a former period, and describing their condition with that air of probability which distinguishes all his pictures of human manners. He speaks apparently with the full breast of a poet whose ambition had been fired and fostered by having seen prescriptive honours attached to the poetical art. Deliberate and circumstantial, he seems assured of commanding deep attention and implicit belief: and though he is too simple, and too proudly embarked in his subject, to advert either to himself or his hearers, yet whenever he names the poets of heroic ages, he throws a glory over their memory, an air of magic over their influence, and attaches a sacred importance to their vocation. The value which he attributes to poetical inspiration is intrinsic, and independent of all other gifts and accomplishments. The characters of bard and prophet, so often identified among a rude people, are completely separated by him. He neither attributes the power of song to any of his seers, nor that of prescience to any of his poets; nor do the latter ever affect to be orators, highly as the gift of eloquence is described to have been held in the Homeric times; but, holding a dignified reserve among the loquacious Greeks, they are the only personages who never trouble us with orations.† It is true that in pretensions to

* *Nec dubitari debet quin fuerint ante Homerum poetæ.*—CICERO, *Brut.* I. cap. 18.

† Only one of his poets (Phemius) speaks, in the whole course of the *Odyssey*, but once, and that once in order to save his life.—*ODYSS.* xxii. 345.

heavenly inspiration his poets are not even behind his priests ; and we have a proof of vanity being a very old poetical infirmity, in finding that Thamyris, the oldest of the tribe, was struck blind for self-conceit. In all this, however, Homer paints the bardic character as ancient and honourable, and his verisimilitude has been seldom called in question. Simple too as the art of Poetry must have still been, he makes Phemius boast of it as a power “ of manifold argument ; ” * and we may suppose Homer to have found it possessing at least some variety of character, from the diversity of occasions to which he describes it as already applied. Song was alike the soul of the joyous feast and of the solemn sacrifice. It accompanied the nuptial dance, and was heard in lamentations over the warrior’s bier. † The strains of Demodochus, in the *Odyssey*, exhibit a wide opposition of gaiety and pathos. At one time ‡ they describe the merriment of the Gods at the detection of Mar’s gallantry with Venus ; at another time, they melt the heart of Ulysses with the “ tale of Troy,” till the hero wept, says Homer, § in one of his most beautiful and prolonged similes, “ *as a woman weeps over the husband of her love, who has fallen in battle, on whom she gazes as he pants and dies, till the enemy, smiting her shoulders with a spear, commands her far away into captivity and bondage.* ” ||

The hospitality of a Greek palace is never described by Homer without the presence of a bard, to heighten its festivity. I know not if the *Odyssey* can be said to show the bard to have ever been a permanent inmate of the Prince’s house ; though when we are told of Clytemnestra ¶ being left by her husband, at his departure for Troy, under the guardianship of a poet, ** whom Ægisthus was obliged to get removed to a desert island before he could accomplish his purposes on the Queen, we can scarcely help supposing that the lady would be placed under the same roof with her moral preceptor. On another occasion, we find the bard, in the *Odyssey*, not domesticated in the royal mansion ; but apparently a frequent guest, and brought to it from no great distance in the neighbourhood. †† Phemius complains, in the *Odyssey*, of having been compelled by force to attend the suitors to the house of Penelope. Demodochus is invited to the feast of Alcinous among the chieftains of the land. The herald takes a

* *Odyss.* xxii. 347.

† Two singers are placed as mourners over the dead body of Hector.

‡ *Odyss.* viii. 266.

§ *Odyss.* viii. 521.

|| I have abridged this exquisite passage.

¶ *Odyss.* iii. 267.

** When we speak of a poet in Homeric times, we must always understand a singer ; as the song, the lyre, and sometimes even the dance, accompanied poetic strains. Vide *Odyss.* iv. 17. The accompanying dance there alluded to, was probably pantomimic.

†† *Odyss.* viii. 43.

kindly guidance of his blind steps, and his venerable figure is described as placed in a silver-studded chair, beside the pillar on which his lyre is suspended.* In another passage allusion is made to the bard being received as a wanderer, and to his being certain, at all times, of an hospitality which was considered as his due, and not as eleemosynary. His profession is distinctly spoken of as one entitled to public support, like that of the physician, the architect, and soothsayer—

The prophet, and the healer of disease,
The skilful artist, and the bard inspired
With strains that charm his hearers—these we seek,
And these, in every climate under Heaven,
Are dearly prized.

The active spirit of the Greeks appears, from the Homeric draught of their manners, to have been much addicted to travelling; and of all members of society the bard had the most agreeable motives for being a traveller, in the security of his being welcomed wherever he went in his love of novelty and in his thirst of knowledge. It is to this circumstance that we are probably indebted for the deep acquaintance with human nature and manners which so much enchants us in the works of Homer. He must have been an extensive traveller, and a poet of the people. Had it been otherwise, and had he been a mere retainer of a Prince's court, his poetry would have assumed a stiff, inflated, and servile air. In that case we should not have enjoyed such endearing traits of homely description, as that of the old stone bank on which Neleus sat before his mansion; or of the feelings of Ulysses on discerning the smoke of his native roof.†

* Odyss. vii. 385.

† The day of quarrelling with Homer's simplicity is now gone by. But it is not an hundred years since what was called Criticism derided his simplicity.—It is Lord Chesterfield (I think), or some judge equally competent, who compares Achilles's reproaches of Agamemnon to the language of that place where (as Addison says) "*they sell the best fish, and speak the plainest English.*"—Lamotte's (a French critic) observations on Homer are still more amusing. "We see not," he says, "in the Iliad, either a crowd of staff-officers around Agamemnon, or a *garde de corps*—Agamemnon dresses himself (*it was lucky that powdering and shaving were not yet in fashion*)—and Achilles with his own hand cooks and spreads a repast for the deputies of the army."—One might have helped the Frenchman to better instances of what he calls Homer's *grossièreté*, such as a Princess Royal washing and bleaching the family linen. Perhaps the *grossest* of all simplicities occurs at the table of Alcinous: the poet Demodochus at that table could be in no want of food, yet Ulysses sends him by the herald, a plate of fat pork, as a compliment in return for the pleasure he had received from hearing his poetry. It was exactly as if a modern Prince had condescended to honour a poet at table by inviting him to drink a glass of wine.—Many other *grossièretés* could have been picked out of Homer; but one instance was as good as twenty to a critic who could propose to accommodate Agamemnon with a *valet de chambre*, or Achilles with a *maître d'hôtel*.

The bardic profession could not have commenced with Homer, who describes it as thus distinct and popular; for, even if an individual could create an art, it requires a succession of artists to form a profession. At the same time, whilst we must suppose that there were poems in Greece anterior to the Iliad and Odyssey, it is impossible, though we may guess at their subjects, to determine what those poems were, and by whom they were composed.

Homer has recorded only three poets*—Thamyris, Phemius, and Demodochus, no relics of whom are pretended to be known; and the two last appear to be names of fancy rather than of tradition. He has nowhere mentioned either Orpheus† or Musæus; and his silence respecting them, though not a proof, is something like a presumption, against the idea of their poetical existence having preceded his own. But works nominally ascribed to those two bards are still extant; and to judge by Mons. de Sales, a French academician‡, there is still a belief in the nineteenth century, that we possess the authentic poetry of Orpheus the Argonaut, and of Musæus, the son of Eumolpus and the Moon. Mons. de Sales, with a great deal more modesty than Stephens's auctioneer, who sold heads "*warranted antediluvian*," carries his biographical minuteness only a little farther back than the siege of Troy. He assures us that Orpheus captivated the clergy of Egypt by his affable manners, and that he lost his wife in consequence of teasing her with assiduities when she ought to have been left to solitude and repose. He proves that Orpheus was the son of a king, because he has told us so himself in his Argonautics; and talks of Musæus, his poetical descendant, as well known by his "fine poem" of Hero and Leander. Unfortunately this fine poem appears to have come into the world about 1600 years later than Mons. de Sales had imagined; and the Argonautics is also a comparatively modern poem, making mention of countries with which the Argonauts had probably the same acquaintance as with Botany Bay.

Yet, though nobody but Monsieur de Sales believes the poems of Orpheus, as we have them, to be as old as the golden fleece, yet men deserving graver notice have deemed them the

* There is a passage in the Iliad where the name of Linus has been supposed by some to be alluded to; but Heyné and other critics of the first authority, reject this idea, and understand the word *λινον* to mean simply a chord.

† Homer mentions Amphion, but not as a poet; and says nothing of his building a city by the power of song.

‡ Histoire d'Homère et d'Orphé, Paris, 1808.

refabricated relics of an ante-Homeric poet.* Orpheus, as a bard and founder of mysteries, is frequently mentioned by the ancients.† Pindar calls him the father of poetry;‡ and Plato quotes from works that were certainly current in his age, under the names of Orpheus and Musæus. Matthew Gesner§ therefore supposes that the Athenian Onomacritus, a contemporary of Xerxes, renovated the Orphic poetry from a more ancient dialect, interpolating and abridging it, as he owns, but by no means absolutely forging it.

Certainly, though Homer has been silent about him, an ante-Homeric Orpheus may have existed, and Thrace looks like the probable country of a primitive poet and mystagogue. For the mystic poetry of the ancients, according to Strabo, had many traces of Thracian origin, and the Thamyras of Homer was from that country. The tomb of Orpheus was shown in Greece, and was honoured by the beautiful fiction, that the nightingales in the branches around it excelled all others in sweetness of song. But there was nevertheless an evidently divided opinion among the ancients respecting the authenticity and extreme antiquity of the Orphic works. Cicero imputes them to Cercops, a disciple of Pythagoras. Pindarion, as quoted by Sextus Empiricus,|| makes Onomacritus their fabricator, and declares it the fixed opinion of his time that Greece had no ante-Homeric poetry. But these are comparatively modern sceptics. Cicero says that Aristotle doubted if such a poet as Orpheus had ever existed;¶ and the Stagyræite speaks doubtingly of “*the so called poems of Orpheus and Musæus.*” To go to the fountain-head of history, Herodotus declares his belief, that all the poets given out as older than Homer were of more recent date.**

It has been conceived, however, by very sensible inquirers, that the name of Orpheus, though possibly fabulous, may still represent some real poet who communicated in songs the holy symbols and mysterious secrets of doctrines more pure and ancient than the theology of Homer—doctrines originating in the Asiatic ancestry of the Greeks, or brought less directly from Egypt, that may have been even dim recollections of Divine revelation. Yet I cannot help suspecting that the quantum of poetry, which could have come down to the age of written literature in

* Gesneri Prolegomena Orphica. Rhunkenius also pronounced the Orphic poetry very old, though, with an ambiguity passing all understanding, he allowed at the same time, that it might be of the Alexandrian school.—Vide Hermann’s Orphica, p. 680.

† By Euripides, Med. 543. Iphig. in Aulide, 1711. In Rhes. 943. By Aristophanes, Ran. 1064.

‡ *Ὀρμικτὰς ἀοιδᾶν πατήρ*.—Pind. Pyth. iv. 13.

§ Gesneri Prolegomena Orphica.

|| Sextus Empiricus adv. Mathematic.

¶ Cicero de Nat. Deor. i. 38.

** Herodotus, Euterpe, 53.

Greece from such an ante-Homeric poet, must be at most only a conjectural something, like a mathematical point without definable form or magnitude. At whatever time the Greek mysteries were founded, Homer is silent respecting them; but at the commencement of the republican era in Greece they certainly received a new impulse and enlargement, from the rise of philosophy, and Orpheus was the great poetical authority held out for mystic doctrines and institutions.* The connexion between philosophy and mysticism could not, from the nature of the former, be permanent; but, undoubtedly, there was a connexion between them at an early period in Greece. The institutions of Orpheus and Pythagoras, we are told by Herodotus, were the same. Now, admitting that this circumstance arose from both Orpheus and Pythagoras having drawn mystic doctrines in common from Egypt, yet it is impossible not to suspect that a teacher and reformer such as Pythagoras was, would blend such doctrines with philosophical conceptions of his own. St. Clemens says, that the Greek mysteries were founded by philosophers. Early Philosophy at this period might, no doubt, conceal sublime principles under the veil of secrecy and mystic fraternities. But still she allied herself intimately with priestcraft, and externally, at least, with orgies and mummery; and where these existed, fraud could not be long absent. The veil of mysticism was alike favourable to a visionary and an innovating spirit; and as the metaphysics of an Argonaut could not have been a perfect prototype of the Pythagorean philosophy, the name of Orpheus was likely to be used as a cloak for many new ideas. In the later period of Greek literature, the name of Orpheus has been undoubtedly made an heir-loom of forgery, and it probably was so from the beginning.

Great and good as Pythagoras was, more than one of his scholars is accused of having fabricated Orphic poetry; and the blame being divided, only shows that there were partners in the concern. Onomacritus appears as an old and eminent name in the business. Gesner asserts, that he could not have forged all that he gave out to be Orphic. Of his inability to forge, I know of no proof, except his having been once detected in the fact. But that he had often succeeded, in spite of this one detection, we are helped to guess by Pausanias's frequently rejecting things attributed to Orpheus, as the fabrications of Onomacritus. Of his general modesty and uprightness of character we are pretty well assured by Herodotus, who gives a short but pithy account of him.† He was a priest and a vender of oracles; who was banished from Athens by Hipparchus, for fraudulently pretend-

* Herodotus, Euterpe, 81.

† Herodot. Polymnia, 6.

ing to have found in Musæus a prophecy, that some of the Greek islands were to be swallowed up in the ocean. His banishment was probably more for spreading public alarm, than for executing literary fraud. However this may be, we afterwards find him at the court of Xerxes, spiriting up the Persian monarch to the invasion of Greece. The great king, it seems, had scruples about the undertaking; but Onomacritus plied him with ancient prophecies, which he made so favourable to the barbarians, as to leave no doubt in his majesty's mind, that he should settle the peace of Europe, by seizing on the figs and demolishing the liberties of Athens. If Onomacritus then was a first or main republisher of the Orphic poetry, it could scarcely have come through more suspicious hands, nor can better requisites for an extensive forger be well imagined, than those that meet us in the character of this traitor, renegado, parasite, and salesman of old oracles.

As to the extant Orphic poetry, it is, in fact, not the work of one man, nor of one age; and is not believed by the best judges to be by any means so old as the age of Xerxes. The Hymns are allowed to be the oldest, though even they bear some marks which argue against extreme antiquity. No one can suppose them, as a body, to be the same with those which Pausanias says were sung by the Eumolpidæ in the Eleusinian mysteries; for he tells us that these were inconsiderable in number, and ours amount to eighty-five. But it is possible that they may have preserved a wreck of the forms and expressions of Eleusinian worship. The work entitled the Argonautics is pronounced, by the best judges, to belong to the Alexandrian school; and the Lithica, or poem on stones, which mentions substances unknown in Europe in the age of Pliny, betrays itself, by its mineralogy, to have been written probably as late as the reign of the Emperor Commodus.

The Iliad and Odyssey have no vestige of either religious or philosophical mysticism. Not but that many Greek philosophers pretended to spiritualize their meaning, and to discover refined doctrines, profoundly hid under the veil of their fiction. But the experiment would not succeed. Homer may have some allegory, but his general character is remote from the allegoric, and the reverse of the mystic. This was apparent to other philosophers, such as Pythagoras, Xenophanes, and Heraclitus, who openly taxed him with couching impious fables under his beautiful verses. Hence philosophy, as she grew up in Greece, was complimented by a part of her admirers, as the true daughter of Homeric poetry, whilst, by others, she was flattered as too wise and goodly a personage to have sprung from so old, so ignorant, and so irreligious a parent. Upon the whole, however, the philosophers kept on good terms with the public, by speaking

with tolerable respect of Homer and of poetry at large. Even Plato, when he supposes a poet to visit his republic, proposes to dismiss him with ointment on his hair, a crown upon his head, and a flattering apology—perhaps as likely to suit poetical taste, as an invitation to stay in so demure a commonwealth; and one which, in all probability, satisfied Homer himself, if his soul took any concern in the affairs of Plato's Republic.

But though the Homeric poems were not made for sects, but for the universe, and though they are the earliest unequivocal documents of Greek genius, yet neither is their era exactly ascertained, nor the history of their author known, from his cradle to his grave. The ancients consulted oracles about his birthplace, but disbelieved them when they pretended to fix it. The most received opinion, however, is that he was of Ionia: as his descriptions of winds and countries often agree with the face of nature, when looked at from that quarter; whilst they would be false and strange if taken at Argos or Athens.

The idea of one author having composed either of the two great poems that pass under Homer's name has been violently controverted in recent times, and a general scepticism has been diffused on this subject by the learning of Wolfe and Heyné. Those great men have had antagonists, it is true; but none that were worthy *Ἀντίβιον μαχέσασθαι ἐν αἰνῇ δημοτῇτι*, till our own countryman, Payne Knight,* vindicated the Iliad and Odyssey from the imputation of having been patched into beauty and unity by a crowd of equivocal rhapsodists.

The old and ordinary opinion respecting Homer rests on the double argument, of the consent of antiquity, and of the harmonious design apparent in the Homeric poems themselves. On the latter grounds, a mind strongly susceptible of poetry may, possibly, build more assurance to itself, than it may be able to communicate to others. For the perception of harmonious grandeur, in a poem, is a matter of taste more than demonstration. And persons of the highest philological authority, in the question, may sometimes be the most dead to this species of evidence. Mere erudition will no more ensure the power of appreciating harmonious poetical design, than botanical skill will enable obtuse senses to enjoy the flavour of a fruit, or the smell of a flower.

The epics of Homer are said to have been first brought to the Peloponnesus, by Lycurgus. At the Panathenæan festivals,

* Mr. Knight is so far a dissenter from the old opinion, that he conceives the Iliad and Odyssey to contain internal marks of separate authors; and he admits that both have many interpolations. But the admission of both of those two suppositions is a very different innovation on our accustomed ideas, from supposing such a work as the Iliad to have been a work of medley production and fortuitous design.

they were sung in disordered and detached parts, till, according to one account, Solon, according to another, Hipparchus, and according to a third, Pisistratus, ordered the rhapsodists, one succeeding another, to sing them in regular order. The words of Cicero, to which Professor Wolfe attaches so much importance, are, that "Pisistratus is said to have first disposed the books of Homer, which were formerly confused, into the order in which we now possess them." If this passage really established that the Athenian copy of Homer was the oldest in existence, it is very singular that it should have never been inquired after by the founders of the Alexandrian library. They sent to Sinope, to Massilia, and to the extremities of Asia and Europe, for other copies. They extorted from Athens, at an enormous price, the MSS. of her tragic poetry. But, for this imaginary first edition of Homer, not a demand was made, nor a coin offered. There is nothing however in Cicero's expression of *confusas antea* which either means or proves that the Iliad and Odyssey, though the rhapsodists might repeat them confusedly, came in incoherent scraps from the genius that produced them. Thucydides says nothing of Greece having owed any such obligation to the Pisistratidæ, as that of having first cast the Homeric fragments into one mighty mould. Aristotle praises Homer himself, and no one else, for the artful structure and disposition of parts in his epic poetry. Herodotus, a native of the country where Homer's poetry was first found, and who lived in the next age after the expulsion of the Pisistratidæ, never mentions the scattered rhapsodies of the Iliad and Odyssey, but describes them as poems anciently and absolutely entire. In seeking for better lights than these primitive authorities, learning only seems to be turning a telescope upon utter darkness, through which she can discern no more than the vulgar eye.

How long Homer's writings were preserved in a state of oral tradition, no one can pretend to determine. At the same time it is but fair to admit, whatever arguments may be drawn from the admission, that there is no appearance of the knowledge of writing in his works. At the making of treaties, a little wool was pulled from the slaughtered lamb, but it was not in those days that its skin was yet made into parchments for recording them. The metals were engraved, but not coined. The tomb of the warrior appears without an epitaph. Had the use of letters been familiar, Homer, who delights in describing processes of art, would certainly have sent an epistle from Ulysses to his spouse; and Minerva would have taken special care of its orthography and sealing.

Hence the possibility of one man having composed either the Iliad or Odyssey has been pronounced by some to be incredible.

But let us beware of deciding on this point by our own habits of memory. Our powers of recollection constantly lean on books, even at school, where we are best disciplined into remembering them. In after-life, we seek for general ideas in excursive reading. On the whole, the faculty of memory is, with us, like a servant ill trained, and accustomed to little confidence—awkward when put to the test, and apt to be treacherous when over-trusted. Yet astonishing powers of recollection are attested, even in ages acquainted with books. Xenophon* records, that there were persons in his time who had the whole Iliad and Odyssey by heart. What the human memory can retain of another's composition, it might certainly recollect of its own; and this would be much more likely to be the case in the age of Homer than of Xenophon. Let us imagine all the circumstances of the age operating on such a being as the bard is described by Homer in the heroic times: his inspiration ascribed to the Gods; his calling held by men more honourable than even that of the soothsayer, and the averter of death and disease; his sole business in life to meditate, noon, night, and morning, on those strains that were to render him the favourite of kings and the idol of the people, and to hoard them in a mind undistracted by other pursuits, as the support of his ambition and existence. If we consider these circumstances, we shall hardly believe that a man of genius could be prevented from composing the Homeric works, in a period unacquainted with writing, from the necessary weakness of the human memory.

The supposition, that one genius could have composed them, and found an audience to remember their sequency, is at least as easily admissible, as that the Iliad should have been a medley composition of many poets. For inspiration is a solitary creative spirit, and it is not to knots and groups, or accidental fabricators, that she has ever intrusted those great conceptions, in poetry or painting, or in any of the fine arts, that have commanded the permanent homage of mankind.

The Trojan expedition appears to have had an influence on ancient Greece in many respects similar to that of the Crusades on modern Europe; and as the latter event supplied materials for the romancers, so the former must have given a grand impulse to the spirit of Greek heroic poetry. Dispersed as the strains of romance are over various languages, and fraught with the characteristics of different ages and countries, it is difficult to compare them closely with those of Homer. But it needs only a slight insight into both to be struck by the high superiority of the Greek imitations of life, in point of distinctness and an air

* Xenoph. Symp. iii. 5.

of reality. It is true, that chivalry gave human character some noble peculiarities unknown to the antique time. Though the Hellenic chief might have as much cultivated brain under his helmet as the Crusader, and though he appears upon the whole to have been a more eloquent and sagacious being, yet the heart of the knight affected a degree of courtesy, love, honour, and devotion, to which his ancient prototype made no pretensions. The later ages of chivalry also furnished in her tilts and tournaments, and in the gorgeous cathedrals where her votaries were consecrated, more imposing subjects for description than any games, or sacrifices, or temples that are mentioned by Homer. Even the war-field of the Iliad is without a trumpet, or a standard, to heighten its "*pomp and circumstance*," which is the more remarkable because wind instruments are mentioned, though never as employed in animating troops. The heroic leader is extolled as "*good at the shout*;" and when Homer leads the Greeks into the Troade, he depends for martial effect on his spirited similes, and on the description of phalanxes blazing in armour, and marching in silence that was only broken by the voices of their chiefs and the sound of the earth under their tread.

Yet still Homer found in his heroic age a world by no means of desolate simplicity: on the contrary, its manners display the germs of multifarious civilization. Amidst all the turbulence and insecurity of life there is a mixture of peaceful as well as warlike pursuits. Commerce appears as well as agriculture. Ingenious arts that were not practised by the nobles, were nevertheless held in high estimation; and it is mentioned of a hero who falls in battle, that his father was renowned for his skill in ship-building. It matters not how imperfect the arts might be, to the fact of their mere existence having had a happy influence on the poetry of Homer.* Infantine and rude as they are, they give relief to his scenes of heroic homicide—they remove his simplicity from savage monotony, and they point our associations agreeably to an interest in popular happiness and familiar life.

Whatever traits of moral or physical culture the poet found,

* This subject puts me in mind of a letter with which Mr. Bowles did me the honour of publicly addressing me, in which he says, among other things, that Homer never mentions a bridge. But if *γεφύρα* means a bridge, Mr. B. will recollect an instance in a simile of the 5th Iliad.

———— ποταμῷ πληθοντι εἰκῶς,
Χειμάρρῳ ὅστ' ᾧκα ῥέων ἐκέδασσε γεφύρας.—l. 87, 88.

When the book in which I dissented from Mr. Bowles's theory of criticism, comes to a second edition, I shall have a good deal to say to my reverend friend. I have not misrepresented him as he imagines. But I have no leisure to write pamphlets about him.

he evidently dwells on them with fondness; and where these are absent, his unsophisticated traits of the human heart, together with the antiquity of his pictures, gives them a charm that we should exchange with reluctance for the representations of a more intellectual state of society. Even the redundance of his diction and description seems so much a part of the overflowing fulness of his mind, that we should no more wish him to be succinct than we should desire to see the shores of the Mississippi trimmed into neatness.

The virtues of Greek heroism are rude in comparison with some of those which chivalry professed and even practised. But the high aspirations of chivalry had all some natural origin in the human breast; and a poet who knew man so well as Homer, and who found him raised above the torpor of barbarism, could not fail to exhibit all the elements, even of chivalrous virtue. Accordingly Hector's delicacy to Helen is the same which a Bayard or a Sidney would have shown in similar circumstances; and he reproves even his recreant brother with a generous lenity. His combat with Ajax is conducted with mutual magnanimity. We have no challenges, it is true, about the beauty of mistresses; and the word love, in our genuinely *romantic* meaning, does not meet us in Homer. Nevertheless, the very fathers of Troy speak with a gallant sensibility of Helen's beauty—the scenes of conjugal affection are superlatively beautiful, and the situation of women appears in the *Iliad* to be much more free and honourable than we afterwards find in the height of Attic refinement. In short, we meet in Homer's heroism with all the natural flowers of human virtue, whatever chivalrous cultivation might have afterwards added to their lustre and perfume.

But the effects of chivalry were by no means unmixed: it raised certain sentiments to a factitious magnitude at the expense of others, and its institutions tended, on the whole, to give a formal, hyperbolical, and monotonous cast to human character. Accordingly the personages of romantic fiction have little individuality; and when we have one accomplished knight errant, we may form a tolerable conception of the whole brotherhood. Their virtues are exaggerated, and require but a slight additional touch of exaggeration to convert them into caricature. Whereas Homer, in the ideal of poetry, retains the express image of man, and minutely observes his moral lineaments and proportions, whilst he enlarges heroism above the size of life. Amidst the boldest fables, all his men and women are natural, probable, and strongly discriminated individuals. They are varied as if by chance, yet all harmonizing with the spirit of the age, collectively represent its world of moral character.

Achilles, in the centre, is of the order of spirits that electrify and command mankind. His alarming and sensitive being is the soul of the Iliad, and his very absence and repose are the causes of its disastrous action. He is unquestionably ferocious, but his quarrel is just, he is wronged—high-minded—hating falsehood like the gates of hell—young, beautiful, and predestined to fall. Casual glimpses of his manners are also given, that interestingly soften our conception of him. He is the only hero of the Iliad who amuses himself with music and poetry. The deputies of the army find him in his tent playing on his lyre, and chanting heroic songs; and, though he knows their hateful errand, he receives them with a calm and manly benignity. Horace does him injustice when he calls him a disclaimer of laws* and inexorable; for he melts into tears at the prostrate grey hairs of Priam, the father of the slayer of his friend, though he had lately withstood all the eloquence of Nestor.

It shows the security of Homer in his inspiration, to have introduced such an opponent to Achilles as Hector. But when he leads us to Troy, he makes us Trojans in our affections, and almost seems to become so himself. Prodigal in sympathy with the events and agents which he conjures up, his imagination as tenderly conceives the lamentations of Hecuba, and the heart-sick swoon of Andromache, as it makes itself impetuously congenial with the vengeance of Achilles. Like nature, he is fruitful in creating characters, and like her, impartial in distributing and intrusting virtues to contending parties. Conscious that Achilles could shine by his own light, he fears not to show us his image through tears for the fate of Hector. In delineating Hector by the eulogies of his weeping country and friends, the climax is exquisitely perfected by Helen. All others who had bewailed him, she says, were bound to him by reciprocal ties; but her's was the grief of gratitude for the undeserved and gratuitous kindness of his mighty heart. He had interposed when others had reproached her—he had soothed her when her tears flowed at their reproaches.

Æneas creates a less ardent, though still respectable interest; and it is increased by a hint, which is thrown out with an air of minute historical probability, that Priam was jealous of his greatness, and that his virtues had been partially thrown into the shade. What expression in every figure of this mighty tablet!—what diversity even between men incompetent to great actions; as between the abject coward and vulgar braggart Thersites, and the gay good-natured Paris, whose spirit, though

* ——— inexorabilis, acer,
Jura negat sibi nata, nocetque nocetur.

sunk in luxury, still shows some traces of his noble breed! The stout arm and heart of Ajax stand him in lieu of all piety, craft, or sensibility; whilst Sarpedon, bleeding in warfare not his own, spends his last generous breath in exhorting the brave to rally the battle. Homer is above all artificial antithesis in the painting of character; but in describing natures remotely different, he could not avoid exhibiting contrasts; and that which is visible between Achilles and Ulysses, is as perfect as heroic nature can afford.

The youthful Diomed is among the Greeks, next to Achilles, the apparent favourite of the poet:—all spirit and lustre, his valour burns like “*the unwearied fire that plays on his shield and crest.*”^{*} Like Achilles, he is insulted by Agamemnon, who charges him with cowardice on the eve of battle; but he is wise as well as warlike, and it is not till his actions have belied the imputation, that he retaliates upon his commander. When the Greeks have been worsted, and when Agamemnon proposes abandoning the siege, Diomed, the youngest of all the chiefs, rises in the council, and gives him a dignified rebuke. Agamemnon himself is not without the virtues of fraternal affection, and willingness to listen to able counsellors. He has also his day of distinction in the field. But his importance altogether is more royal than personal, and his faults are made conspicuous by his supremacy. Alternately presumptuous and despondent, he is the readiest to tax others with deficient courage, and the first himself to despair under public reverses. He is also unmerciful in victory. The cry of *ξάγρει Ἀτρεὺς υἱὸς* is addressed to him in vain, and he makes two of the most atrocious refusals of quarter that occur in the Iliad. It has been remarked, that Homer speaks as a friend to royal government; but still he describes it as too limited, or rather as too undefined, to be despotic; and the chiefs in the councils of the Iliad present us with a sort of Greek picture of Gothic feudalism. And if he shows respect for monarchy, he makes his kings no monopolists of virtue. In poetical justice, he seems to have thought it sufficient to give Agamemnon the diadem, and a few good qualities, as his share of importance in the poem, leaving brighter heroic endowments to chiefs subordinate in political power.

Amidst these forms which the Iliad exhibits in the bloom or strength of heroism, the aged characters are no less happily distinguished. Nestor looks back on a life of greatness and wisdom:—he has no rival in venerable years; his powers have

reached the last ripeness of experience, but they have also something of the mellow tint that precedes decay. He dwells on his own exploits with an egotism and fulness that could only be endured in the most ancient of men. Phœnix, the friend of Achilles, on the other hand, is also old, but his youth had been embittered by misery and vindictive passions; and when he comes to exhort the hero against excessive resentment, he confesses his early errors in a tone very different from the self complacency of Nestor.

Priam is neither very wise nor energetic; but his heart is warm with natural affections, and his woes and years sustain our reverence and solicitude. When the wail of the Trojans bursts from their walls, at the sight of Hector dragged in triumph by his conqueror,—when the frantic father implores his friends to let him go forth, and implore the pity of the destroyer, the struggle of his people to detain him, and the voice of his instinctive agony, surpass almost every thing in the pathos of poetry, and affect us more like an event passing before our eyes, than a scene of fictitious calamity. Never was the contrast of weakness and strength more fearful, than when he throws himself at the feet of Achilles, whilst his feeble perspicacity makes us tremble at every moment, lest he should light up the inflammable temper of Achilles, fluctuating between wrath and compassion. Yet, hallowed by paternal sorrow, age and weakness prevail. The old man accomplishes his point, and the terrific victor condescends to the delicacy of even veiling Hector's corpse from his view.

The mythology of the great poet, cannot be acquitted of undignified passages; but among these the most notoriously objectionable, viz. the allusion to the suspension and flogging of Juno, has been generally deemed an interpolation by the best judges. Traits of grandeur and beauty, however, are not wanting, even in his mythology; witness the meeting of the King and Queen of Heaven on the mountain, where the flowers are described as springing up spontaneously on the spot of their embrace. And taken in a general view, his Heaven is made more amusing by its anthropomorphism than it could have been rendered by purer religious ideas. His divinities are only immortal men and women surpassing mortals in power and beauty, but not the less interesting because they transfer the passions of humanity to Olympus. His heroes are their kindred, and glow with the tints of their celestial consanguinity. His ethereal and heroic natures thus approach in partial contact like the blending skies and mountains of a beautiful landscape, where the hues of Heaven and earth insensibly melt into each other.